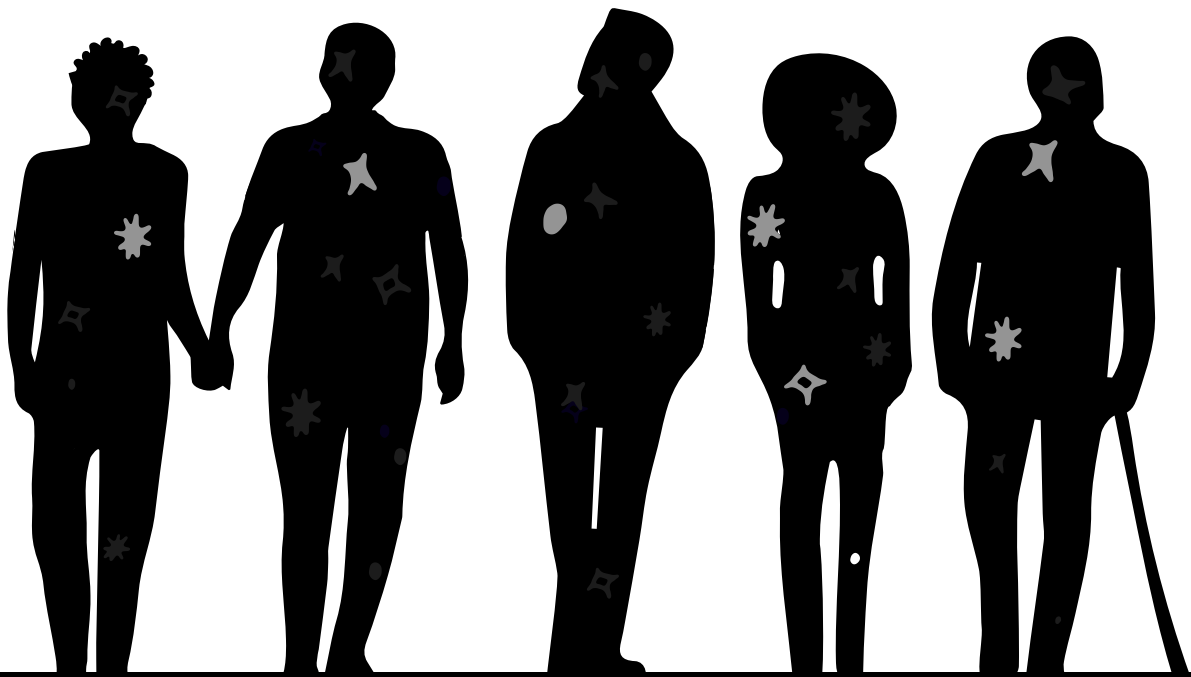


THE COSMIC WE

Episode 6:
The Ethics of Love

with Dr. Dorsey O'dell Blake



from the CENTER FOR ACTION AND CONTEMPLATION

Dorsey: But Dr. Thurman, and I know we talk about his mysticism, everybody thought he's a mystic and so on. He was not a mystic though who just spent all this time trying to say, I am with God and blah, blah, blah, blah. When you read his Jesus and the Disinherited, when you read the Luminous Darkness, he is talking about how does this religion of Jesus or this ethic of love apply to current situations. And if we took it seriously, we would not have the problems that we have today. And that's not only locally, nationally, but internationally. And so how do we move? Is my question. How do we move to be more embracing of the differences?

Donny: This podcast explores the mystery of relatedness as an organizing principle of the universe and of our lives.

Barbara: We're trying to catch a glimpse of connections beyond color, continent, country or kinship. And we're going to do this through science, mysticism, spirituality, and the creative arts.

Donny: I'm Donny Bryant.

Barbara: I'm Barbara Holmes. And this is The Cosmic We.

Donny: Today we have as our special guest, Dr. Dorsey Odell Blake. Dr. Blake has served as presiding minister of the Church for the Fellowship of All Nations in San Francisco since 1994. Fellowship Church was co-founded in 1944 as the nation's first internationally, interracial, interfaith congregation by Drs. Howard Thurman and Alfred Fisk. Dr. Blake also serves as faculty associate at Pacific School of Religion, as well as a faculty member of the Proctor Institute Children's Defense Fund. Additionally, he is a member of the advisory board of ethics and tech and the board of directors of the Gus Newport Project. Dr. Dorsey Blake, welcome to our podcast.

Dorsey: Thank you very much. I feel honored to be invited. I have certainly been very impressed with Dr. Holmes's work for some years, and very happy to meet you also.

Barbara: So glad to have you with us.

Donny: Dr. Dorsey, it is a privilege to have you here. Some of our guests have been exposed to the church that you currently pastor. But I really want to start this out, before we get into this very influential and historical institution that you are leading currently, could you give our audience a little bit about your background, from your perspective, your origin story, how you got to this point, how you were guided to this place. Could you give us a little bit more about that journey?

Dorsey: Yes. And I will ask you to stop me if I go on too long, because it is a quite interesting journey and I don't know how much you wanted to get into my action movement to Fellowship Church. But I was born in Kansas City, Missouri. My family moved to Liberty Missouri, which is about 15 miles from Kansas City when I was about eight months old to take his first pastorate, at first Baptist Church, Mountain Zion district, Liberty, Missouri. One of the claims to fame in Liberty was that Jesse and Frank James spent time in the Clay County jail [inaudible 00:03:39] in Liberty, and supposedly buried some treasure there but nobody ever found it in Liberty.

- Dorsey: So I was fourth out of nine children. Experiences that maybe has shaped me much later happened when I was young. My father as a minister at the Baptist Church in Liberty and applied to William Jewell College to finish his academic work, which was stopped by World War II and the draft. He was refused because of race. He told me that the president actually made a visit to the house and basically told him that, "Well, you've got all these children", he had five at the time, "and you cannot afford to go to our college. It's too expensive" and blah, blah, blah. And he said, well, Uncle Sam's paying for it. I served in the army and so I had the GI bill, whatever.
- Dorsey: So then he just came out and told him, he just could not attend because they didn't allow black people or Negroes, the word used at that time. So I think that was part of my formation in terms of exclusion inclusion. He went on however, to go to Rockhurst, which was a Jesuit school in Kansas city. The president of Rockhurst college heard about this and made some news and contacted my father to see if he would be interested in attending Rockhurst.
- Dorsey: And so he did and was the first black to attend Rockhurst College in Kansas city, Missouri, and to graduate. And then the later on the first black person to attend Midwestern Baptist theological seminary in Kansas city, and to graduate. So that's part of my history. Part of my history also is the fact that he worked with people. He was there as a counselor for people, a very segregated community. Liberty was very segregated then. And I guess that inspired me to understand that something had to be done to deal with the racism, the racial divide in our country. At that time, of course, I did not know how, and I was not a person to think in terms of movement realities, but I was a person who always objected to segregation and I never, and this is my fault, I never bought into the fact that black people were inferior.
- Dorsey: Never. Because, I guess, of my father being very prominent in our black community, and when things were desegregated, baseball, literally baseball first, and then the schools, I excelled and lot of black kids excelled. So there was nothing in my experience to say that you are inferior. Nothing. So that was really, I think, quite a gift to me growing up that I received from my father and my mother, who was always absolutely so supportive. I attended Brown University as an undergraduate majoring in pre-med, which I spent too much time in, two years before I dropped out. There were signals before that.
- Barbara: Didn't like the sight of blood or something?
- Dorsey: Exactly. How did you know?
- Barbara: I tried the same thing.
- Dorsey: Oh, and I kept saying, well, I'm sure I'll grow out of this. I'm sure I'll grow out, but no, I could not stand and it terms of dissecting, oh no, I couldn't do this.
- Barbara: I couldn't either.
- Dorsey: So anyways, I ended up majoring in sociology. There were a lot of things that happened at Brown's campus, which were amazing in terms of the black speakers. I

saw and heard many of the top black speakers, James Farmer, Martin Luther King, [inaudible 00:07:21] Clayton Powell. Malcolm X was assassinated. He was scheduled to come March the fifth, 1965. And he was assassinated in April. I went to see him February 21st and I looked forward to meeting Malcolm. But one of the experiences that really was transforming, in a way, was meeting Dr. King, who came to campus in 1967. Not too long, I think about a week and a half or whatever, after he gave his great speech at Riverside Church, beyond Vietnam at times to break silence. This is my junior year in college and I was ushering and I looked at my watch. I said, well, Dr. King is late. The programs, he blah, blah, and so on.

Dorsey: And I was going and all of a sudden I felt from the back, this presence, this energy just enveloped me. And I looked around and it was Dr. King. When he got up to speak at sales hall, I said, it was like Isaiah being in the temple and the temple being filled with this awesome presence.

Dorsey: It seemed like he was one of the prophets from the Hebrew scriptures. There was a radiance about him. He filled the temple, and when it was over, he looked like he was 10 feet tall. He really was just, it was just this awesome presence. And in the reception line, after the service, went over to him, I realized he's a little dude. He's shorter than I am. But yeah, when he was speaking, it was like... And we had a wonderful conversation, actually. We had some time to talk and he was the one who convinced me to file for a conscientious objection to the Vietnam war, which is something I'd been thinking about. But his presentation, he urged people to do that. And I told him that I had been thinking along those lines and he had convinced me to apply.

Dorsey: He actually offered, he invited me to send, I said I'm not Baptist. I don't know what the Baptist believe, the national Baptist, the black Baptist. I don't know what they believe about war or whatever. And I need something to support my argument. And he said, well, send your draft to me if you like, and I'd be happy to look at it. And I never did. You know how students are. Last minute, I got to get this thing into selected service board. Martin Luther King say, look, but I got to the night before, whatever. And so I did not get him to look at it, which is one of my real regrets.

Barbara: But what a generous offer.

Dorsey: Yes. I couldn't believe it. My regret was I did not hop in his car and go with him to Boston. That's where he was headed. He was just enormous presence, which I still can't describe him. I'm still bothered by it. So when his assassin... But the other thing that happened was, my heart made a promise to him, I think, that whatever I did with my own life had to be consistent with what he was doing, would try to help in some kind of way. And that has followed me all of my life, because there's still times when I think about his life. And every year in my class, one of my classes at Pacific School of Religion, I show the film, At the River I Stand, which is the film about his going to Memphis, working with

the sanitation workers. And that's where he was assassinated. And I think about the night before, when he said, I'm not fearing any man, my eyes have seen the glory of the coming.

Dorsey: And every time I hear that the chills just return. And I go, this is a person. If we don't understand this, this is a person who embodied all that Jesus embodied, as far as I'm concerned. It was also giving of his life into the all pervading presence as sermon [inaudible 00:11:38] So Dr. King was an extraordinary influence on me. My senior year, I wasn't sure what I was going to do when I graduated. And a lot of my friends at Brown would say, you're going into ministry, aren't you? Aren't you going to be a minister? I'm going to listen. I said, my father is a minister. Ministers don't make any money.

Barbara: Precisely.

Dorsey: I am tired of being poor. I said, no. But they all kept saying, but you act like a minister. You blah, blah, blah, this, all this kind of thing. So finally what happened was, I was in the chaplain's office and we had a fine chaplain, Charles Baldwin, just amazing. And a person at times worked with him. Dr. Julius Scott. Both I saw in his office, as I often went to his office after waiting for his sermons, the next day after his sermon. And I found this propaganda sheet from Pacific School of Religion. I never heard of Pacific School of Religion. Didn't know where it was, but it was like, are you dissatisfied with the world?

Dorsey: Are you discontent with what is happening? Yes. There are about eight questions. Yes, yes, yes. He said, aha. You're part of the new breed. Some of the new breed are going to peace corp, which I had looked at. Some at the Vista, which I return, and some are coming to theological seminary. And it was just so amazing. I said, okay, I've got to apply to this place. I looked at other places. So I applied and I was arrogant enough to call about a week later and say, am I in or not?

Dorsey: And he said, oh no, you're in. So that kind of thing. And that's how I got to PSR. The reason I'm saying that it was through PSR, as a student there, that I was able to first meet Dr. Howard Thurman. There was a program or department, actually, centered at the Graduate Theological Union, of which PSR was a member. There were the nine seminaries, which were part of the GTU the Graduate Theological Union consortium. And there was a center for Urban Black Studies that developed on Martin Luther King's birthday, 1969. And they taught courses there. And students for all the seminaries could take courses and get credit for it. So I had taken lot of the courses, the director of the program was Dr. Williams, Dr. [inaudible 00:13:57] Williams, who had studied with Dr. Thurman at Boston university. He was there a year with King. So he knew Dr. King and other people who were there, some outstanding leaders. Anyways, he at one point said, well, after I'd taken all these, he said, why don't you do an independent studies and Dr. Howard Thurman. I said, Dr. Who?

Barbara:

Well.

Dorsey:

He said, you don't know who Dr. Howard Thurman is. I said, no. Why should I know who Dr. Howard Thurman is? I've never heard of him. And he told me a little bit about Dr. Howard Thurman and from his secretary, Ms. Rivas, I received contact information and called and made an appointment for this Saturday morning, to see Dr. Thurman. So I got there and the instructions were to ring all three bells. That's okay. I found out later it's because he had to study on one level in office, the tapes on another level, then he and Mrs. Thurman lived on another level. So within a few minutes somebody came to the door. This elderly black man came to the door and greeted me and good morning, we exchanged good mornings. And then I told him who I was, and I had an appointment to get some books from Dr. Thurman.

Dorsey:

And he goes, yes. And so I walked right past him. And again, this thing sort... So I go, I turned said, are you Dr. Thurman?

Donny:

Wow.

Dorsey:

And he said, yes. So we had a good conversation. First of all, he told me that the book to begin with was the Growing Edge, because that would give me some understanding of how he developed his worship service with the meditation, the prayer, message and so on. He then informed me that he was preaching the next day at the Church for the Fellowship of All Peoples. So I said, oh my God, I have to go. So I here that came to the church. This is where I am right now and sat on the very back pew, place was just full. And throughout his sermon, I guess, I had my head in my hands.

Dorsey:

It was just unbelievable. Now, if you ask me today, what did he preach about? I don't know. It was not what he was saying. It was a presence that he brought. And after the service, I went to him and said, you know how marvelous the sermon was. And he was saying, well, yes, I was wondering when you were going to come up for air. So that was Dr. Thurman. He was aware all the time of who was in the presence. One of my predecessors at the church, as pastor said, told similar stories. He said, the first time he heard Dr. Thurmond was at a church in Berkeley.

Dorsey:

And he was so impressed and wanted to say something to Dr. Thurman. But by the time he got to Dr. Thurman, there were all these people around him and he had to leave. So he didn't get a chance to see Dr. Thurman. Then there was another occasion and he heard Dr. Thurman speak and said, this time, I don't care how long it takes, I'm going to go and say something to Dr. Thurman. So he went to Dr. Thurman and started to say, how much I appreciate. And Dr. Thurman said to him, yes, I remember you. You were at the presentation at the Baptist in Berkeley, and you were sitting over, and he was just shocked.

Barbara:

Amazing.

Dorsey:

It was amazing. Because to make this very clear, because this person was white and most of the congregation was white. So it's not like one black person out of the entire congregation he could recognize. It wasn't that at all. So he had that amazing facility of remembering, being so aware of everybody, their presence, of what they brought

through the encounter. So that was Dr. Thurman. I was able to do my independent studies, which led then to a course taught at the Center for Urban Black Studies on Dr. Howard Thurman. And I was trying to find the article in Jet Magazine that said that... At least I was told that, that was the first course ever taught, as far as they knew, on a black personality at a college in Savannah.

Barbara: That aura that you talk about when Dr. Thurman was preaching or speaking remains at the Church of the Fellowship of All People, because I was there, and it's been a while. I think back in 2002. And of course, Dr. Thurman had long since passed. He wasn't there, but whoever was giving the meditation, I don't believe you were there that Sunday, the same thing happened to me. I came there as a person writing a book, working on Joy Unspeakable, wanted to go down to where Howard Thurman's church was. My mom was with me. And all of a sudden I'm sitting there, I'm just observing. I'm not going to worship. I'm going to observe. And all of a sudden I am engulfed. I am deeply immersed. I'm going places I don't necessarily want to go. The meditation was so... It felt like a baptism. There was something about the space, the diversity, the people. I tried to write about it in the book, but I couldn't even get close to what the experience was like.

Dorsey: But I read something where you did do a good job, a beautiful job of describing your experience at the church. I don't know who was there that Sunday, but Dr. Catherine Benton, who is our co minister, is just marvelous with meditations. That means she is something, but that is still a part of our service, meditation. And we try to reserve a few moments before church, quiet. And then part of our service is a period of meditation. It varies, because we also ask different people to do the meditation, so they can volunteer to do meditations. And sometimes it's sharing their journey, sharing something that they have written or whatever. But we always try to surround it with some quiet time at the very beginning, and some quiet time at the end. And that is based on so much that Thurman had to teach us.

Barbara: What surprises me is that since it was such a revolutionary idea to put together multiethnic, multi-religious folk to worship together, you would think that would've expanded beyond Fellowship Church. And yet it hasn't. Given the state of the world, what is the future for multiethnic, multi-religious congregations, do you think?

Dorsey: There are a few around, but my hope is in some of the interfaith community organizing groups, because a lot of them are bringing people together from various faith traditions and dealing with some very serious issues, like immigration, like the impoverished communities in our nation. That doesn't mean just all the interfaith groups, because I think many of them can be a bit removed from the everyday lives of people. And there's a lot of exchange of texts, and that's nice, and that's informative, it's educational, it's helpful. However, there must be a moving beyond just the exchange of text to really get involved in some of the things that are happening in this world. There was a professor who said long time ago, if you want to know the history of the world, earth, history of war, look at the history of religion and how much religions have been involved in wars of the world.

Dorsey: And I have not found that to be as serious a priority as it needs to be in some of the

interfaith churches. And I agree with you on the interfaith churches, intercultural churches, as they called them. I've been to some and it's nice to participate, but Dr. Thurman, a lot of people, and I know we talk about his mysticism. Everybody thought he's a mystic and so on. He was not a mystic though, who just spent all his time trying to say I'm with God and blah, blah, blah, blah. When you read his Jesus and the Disinherited, when you read the Luminous Darkness, he is talking about how does this religion of Jesus or this ethic of love apply to current situations?

Barbara: Yes.

Dorsey: And if we took it seriously, we will not have the problems that we have today. And that's not only locally, national, but internationally. I think if we had taken some of these understanding seriously, we may not have had this war, Russia against Ukraine, or the other wars that we tend to forget, Iraq, because they were basically Muslim people there. But we didn't say much about that. We didn't have international coalition saying, oh, this is wrong. That kind of thing. And so how do we move, is my question? How do we move to be more embracing of the differences? And I think a lot of times we... And I think it's important to understand the commonality, but I think sometimes we move too quickly into common ground or reconciliation without looking at justice pieces, compassion pieces, those kinds of things. So I would agree with you, but at the same time, one of the things that Mrs Thurman said to me was very beautiful.

Dorsey: She was just an absolutely wonderful person. And she said, I feel sorry for you ministers today because you have so much that you have to respond to that Howard, as you come, did not. And what she meant by that was that you're always being pulled, because now you do have this interfaith thing, and you're always being asked to participate in this, participate in that and participate in that. What I think she was really trying to say, you don't really have the time to devote to replenishing your spirit, which is absolutely necessary if you're going to be effective in the work that you were called to do. And I agree with her on that very much so. We are so busy that, and I hear you, Dr. Holmes, I think you're right on target, that there have been a lot, there have been, not a lot, but some interfaith, intercultural churches. And the question is, how deep are they and what kind of impact have they had on the larger life?

Donny: Dr. Blake, I actually am part of a interfaith and interracial faith community in Michigan. Small community, was founded in 2016. I am the senior pastor of that community. And I've been really inspired by the intentionality behind the formation of the Church for the Fellowship for all Peoples in San Francisco. One of the questions that I wrestle with is, is leadership, particularly leading in this particular age, leading through the chaotic moments. And I love how you correlated the manifestation of love, not just the inner transformation and the inner spiritual journey of the individual, but you made it relevant to how that plays out, how that love looks in the world, how that manifests. But what is the role of leadership? You mentioned Dr. Thurman and Dr. Fisk and the co leadership there, and you talk about your co leader, your co pastor, within your organization today, are there some wisdom insights that we can glean from the intentionality of how leadership works together to bring forth this interracial, interfaith community that actually does love in the world?

Dorsey: One of the reasons I met Fellowship Church was because of Mrs. Thurman, and Mrs. Thurman saw in me something that she thought was important, that I would bring. And I think part of it was, she was very clear that I was also an activist and that was needed at the church at that time. My co minister, Dr. Benton and I, first of all, she was a student at the University of Creation Spirituality when I was there as director of the program. So we had this relationship that we knew. So I knew of her deep spirituality. I was on her dissertation committee and so on. And her understanding too, of the relationship between the communion or miss with God and the realities of life. So we are attuned to that. I think the other thing we have tried to do is to be open to other people who come, who have also ideas.

Dorsey: I think if you read Dr. Thurman's *The Search for Common Ground*, at the very end, the last paragraph is just awesome. When he basically says we can't survive, we can't go forward, unless we are open to people coming from all places who refresh us. Without that you're going to become very insulated or isolated, and you can't have a future if that is where you are. So I think part of the leadership has to be one of openness, and to find that you learn. There has to be a dynamic relationship between leadership and those in the congregation. So it is a constant calling forth each other. So they keep calling us into leadership as we call them into community. And I think the basis of that is that this idea of love. Everybody at that church, that I know of, is really committed to justice issues, peace issues.

Dorsey: And so what the church does, and this is a beautiful thing, the church is a place... In fact, last Sunday, we had an ordination not too long ago, we've had several. And this was of another, a transgender person, and reason I'm saying transgender, but this one person said, oh, I think this might be the only church who's had two trans... We've actually ordained three, this kind of thing. And one of the things that our board chair said, I had not put in these terms, I put in up terms, this church is like a filling station. He said, when you're out there running in the world, and doing all these kinds of things, we're here. You stop by here. And we try to replenish you in order for you to keep running, to do what you've got to do in the larger world. And that was the emphasis of Dr. Thurman, that the church should be a place for spiritual renewal, for growth, for growing deeper in one's own spirituality and the connection between that and what you do in the larger world

Donny: That is truly a model for all churches. Wow. Thank you. Thank you.

Barbara: You have a sermon series expressing a sense of awe.

Dorsey: Yes.

Barbara: How do we maintain that sense of wonder in our current world?

Dorsey: I think one of the things is to, what I said last Sunday in my sermon, for example, was the fact that when you read Dr Thurman's works, and he talks, as a child, how he was so connected to nature, the stars, and how he had this oak tree in his backyard that he could lean against and pour out all that happened in the day. My point is knowing that, not only did the oak tree have his back, but the oak tree actually spoke to him in

consummate language, tree language, this kind of thing. But we were all born into a world of awe. We all have had a sense of awe when we were children. That's the thing that guided our emotions, our lives. We were exploring. We would do things that parents said, no, no, no, don't do that.

Dorsey: You pull this. No, no, no, no, no, you can't come. You come back in here. Don't stay after dark. Well we were excited about the dark. What's in the dark? This kind of thing. So we were born with that, all of us, when we were kids, looked up at the stars and go, wow. Or the moon. Wow. Those kinds of things. So we were born with that, this idea of exploring, going beyond boundaries. That's part of the mysticism, going beyond what is norm or the acceptable. And we had to be brought back and socialize. That is the problem. And we made our socialization our reality rather than our awe. So one of the things that we have to do is to recreate that system. And it's there. We try to do that. If you look at our, in fact, our bulletin, that's what we talk about.

Dorsey: We don't have a call to what... We have, what we start with is expressing a sense of awe. That's what's in our bulletin. Not call to work, expressing a sense of awe. And part of that expression of awe has not only to do with how marvelous each day is, but the fact that the awe that I am here with the two of you, two kinfolks, K-I-N folks. I don't know how we're related by blood, but we are related by the essence of God that is in us, by the all pervading presence that Thurman talks about. We are kinfolks. And I have a chance today to be with two of my kinfolk. One I haven't seen in a long, long, long time or heard in a long, long, long time, and a new kin person I did not even know about, this kind of thing.

Dorsey: Isn't that amazing. And the amazing, the experiences we just talked about that we share. Reverend Brian, you're talking about your church, a new church. Wonderful. The question of how do you lead? Dr. Holmes, all the books you've written, your leadership at Memphis Theological, all this kind of stuff. That's all. How do we, as human beings do these kinds of things? How do we participate in these kinds of things? And how do we come together to support, renew each other? That's all. Life is a mystery. And one of the problems with our churches has been that they refuse to see life as a mystery. We codify it. Now you have to believe this creed. You have to believe this dogma. No you don't. This is not what life is about. That's not what God is about. Jesus didn't lead all these creeds and dogmas that you got to follow.

Dorsey: So the awe is really, I think, being present to life and engaging life. You have your program, The Cosmic We. I love that term, because that's what it about. Not just the cosmic I, but the cosmic we, and how do we define the we? We can define the we in terms of trees rivers, rocks, those kinds of things, but also the we in terms of who we are. So we're not, again, this kind of segmentation, individualism, which this nation promotes. No, I even said, the whole question in this nation, we talk about coming up the Declaration of Independence. That's such an awful document in terms of the names, not in terms... Because we should talk about a declaration of interdependence, not only among us, but with the whole web of life.

Dorsey: If we did, like in some of these traditional African context, we would not have these ecological problems that we're having. If we could treat the ecosystem the way it needs

to be treated, we would not have to deal with the fact that the world might not be with this much longer. There's a friend of mine who said, instead of even saying, the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, maybe we should say, the earth is the Lord. And the quote is, how will we think differently? How will we treat the world, nature differently, if we said the earth is the Lord?

Donny: Seeing the sacredness in creation?

Dorsey: Yes. The sacredness of creation and the sacredness of our own lives. Matthew Fox does a beautiful job in terms of his book, *Original Blessing*, where he says, and he takes on this thing about being born in original sin. And he goes, we were not born in original sin. We were born originally blessed. We were blessed, original blessing. We are all expressions of God, the divine presence. We are trying to see what that presence looks like, feels like, what that presence does now. And God depends on us to do that. We're the agents of this all prevailing presence.

Dorsey: And that cannot be coming from somebody who's just friend of mine used to talk, well. He only said it once in my presence. We're all just filthy rags. I'm going, no, you're not filthy rags. No, no. Where we get that kind of stuff, throw it out. We have to throw a lot of stuff out that we've been taught, including the great sacred text, the Bible. There's a lot of stuff in there that is just not relevant and actually is oppressive. And if we buy into it, we're going to buy into a lot of oppression against a whole lot of people.

Donny: I love that juxtaposition between original blessing and original sin, which was handed to us by Augustine.

Dorsey: Yes.

Donny: But Father, Richard Rohr, He has another spin on that. He calls it original goodness.

Dorsey: Yes.

Donny: Right. The original goodness of creation. Right.

Dorsey: Yes. I'm on the mailing list. Consider, action and contemplation.

Donny: Absolutely.

Dorsey: So, and that's helpful.

Barbara: Hearing you speak, I hear the reverberations of your mentor, Thurman.

Donny: Without a doubt.

Barbara: I know why Sue Bailey Thurman chose you. I know why she handed those robes of his to you. And I understand why the mantle was placed on your shoulders.

Dorsey: When I returned to the Bay Area, I had gone away a couple years. Once I was teaching at the University of Alabama for five years, I was the first black, full-time, male at the

University of Alabama, teaching in Tuscaloosa. And I came back for three years to work on a PhD, which I didn't finish that time. Then I went to Athens, Ohio, this campus ministry then back in six years. Anyway, when I came back, I was director of the Center for Urban Black Studies and Mrs. Thurman called the center for Dr. Williams. And I answered the phone and I said, Mrs. Thurman, Dr. Williams is no longer director, he's chair of the board. I am director of the center. So she was saying she had called to invite me to a convocation of Howard Thurman scholars at Fellowship Church to invite him in. So I told her again, he was not here.

Dorsey: And she said, she invited me. And she ended with saying, well, you're a Howard Thurman scholar and I was blown away. Because I never saw myself in terms of a Howard Thurman scholar. I just really... So two years, about two years later, she called and said that the church was really having some serious issues financially, and she had wanted, the board had wanted me to come by and consult with them in terms of how to go forward with so little money. I never got the call from the chair of the board, never. And the Sunday they cannot afford the minister, the Sunday right after the minister left, because they cannot afford to pay him. Mrs. Thurman called me and Mrs. Thurman developed something that she knew she could always get me to say yes, she called and said, Sir Dorsey, that's what she called me.

Dorsey: When she wanted something. Would it be possible for you to come to Fellowship Church and preach for us this Sunday? You know, just to give us a sense of continuity. And I said, yes, Mrs. Thurman, I could do that. So after this sermon, she came to me again and said, Sir Dorsey, could you come again next week to preach for us? You know, just to sort of give us a sense of continuity. I said, yes, Mrs. Thurman. That Sunday she said, Sir Dorsey, I was wondering, would it be possible for you to stay with us until the end of the year, through December? You know, just to give us a sense... I said, Mrs. Thurman, I'm director of the Center for Black Studies, I'm really active in the community. I've just gotten a doctorate in ministry program. Yes, Mrs. Thurman. Then at a meeting at her house, a board meeting in February, we were sitting together by each other on the couch, and this was not on the agenda.

Dorsey: And all of a sudden she just turned to me and said, Sir Dorsey, don't you think it's time for you to become minister at Fellowship Church. So that's how it happened. And then it took me some time to actually have my installation service. The reason I'm saying that is Mrs. Thurman was really the person, of course the board was very happy and all this stuff, but when we decided to have the ordination, that's when she told me, at one point, later on, that she was going to present Dr. Thurman's robe to me, and I was really going to... It didn't really strike me because there were so many things going on. But what happened was, when she, at the very end of the service, when she came up with her little suitcase and the chair of the board, she took it out.

Dorsey: The last words she said before she put it on me, the last words were, and this robe hasn't been worn since Howard's death. So she put it on me. And I think his essence was still there. It felt like it was actually clinging, clinging to me. And I could not speak. I'm verbal, as you can tell, but I could not speak. So I walked away from the podium and said, okay, take three deep breaths. You can go back. So I did, I took my three deep breaths. And so I went back and I tried again, and nothing would come

out. There was a Allen Temple Baptist church's male chorus was providing music for us that Sunday. There's deacon, Michael Johnson, who was a friend from Allen Temple, shouted out while I was in this thing, let the Lord use you. Reverend, let the Lord use you.

Dorsey: And then all of a sudden the tears and what happened was, it was so beautiful, my former secretary, my closest friend still, Aletta Rivas, and one of the Reverend Lawrence Lakey was a CME minister. And we were in school together. He was at the Presbyterian school and I was at then PSR. I guess they made eye contact across the aisles. And the next thing I knew they were coming up the aisle together. And one stood on one side and one on the other, and just sort of held me. And that really ended the service. And one of my students, who came up later to hug me, he said, do you know there was electricity in your body? He said, when I hugged you, it was just... And others said that too, that it was. But it was the experience that I just don't know.

Dorsey: I don't know what happened, but I was just very grateful for that, and still feeling it in many ways that I don't know if I can live up to this, to receive his robe. I'm really not worthy of this at all. Just not worthy, but I accept it because it does come from Mrs. Thurman. And for some reason, she has decided to do this. So Mrs. Thurman has a very special, special role in my life. And I'm hoping that someday there'll be more people who talk about her and her great contributions to the world, because they too were enormous.

Barbara: Oh, Dr. Dorsey, thank you so much for inviting us into a very, very, very special glimpse of your life, the life of Howard Thurman, the life of Sue Bailey Thurman and the power, the power of love. Thank you so much.

Donny: Thank you so much, Dr. Dorsey.

Dorsey: Thank you both so much. What an honor this has been, and a great pleasure. Thank you.

Donny: Today. I want to consider, as a reflection from our conversation with Dr. Dorsey, a couple of thoughts. One of the things that I really want us to take away from this conversation was this idea of our spirituality, not just from the understanding of our spiritual maturity, and our inner spiritual development, and our vertical relationship with God. But particularly as he gives us insight to how we show up in the world, how our view of the Christian ethic of love, how it impacts the world around us and how we impact the world around us. So today I want to encourage us to consider a view of our spiritual growth, our spiritual maturity, in a way of not just what it does for us, but how we show up in the communities that we live in. How does this ethic of love, how does this perception and this view of love, how does it impact the world that we live in?